

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Royal Gorge Field Office
3028 E. Main Street
Cañon City, CO 81212**

Public Scoping

Ecology Park Area Trail Development

DOI-BLM-CO-F02-2014-0031 EA

December, 2014



INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The BLM is preparing an Environmental Assessment to analyze the impacts of designating and constructing non-motorized trails and a trailhead off of New York Avenue in Canon City, Colorado as well as constructing connecting trails between other trail systems and providing additional longer distance loop opportunities. Under current revision, the Eastern Fremont County Trails, Open Space and River Corridor Master Plan has identified that communities in this region desire trails that connect with neighborhoods and other recreation infrastructure. Primary goals include outdoor recreation inspired economic development, improved quality of life for citizens by providing recreation close to homes, and engage youth in outdoor activities. Due to its proximity to town and adjacency to existing recreation infrastructure, the area framed by Temple Canyon Road, Grape Creek and neighborhoods has been identified as a key area for trail development to assist with these goals. Additionally, due to this close proximity to Canon City, several social trails have already been developed within the project area which sees fairly regular non-motorized trail based recreation use both on BLM land and un-signed private land. In the past, the public has approached the BLM about formally designating and managing the trails in the area and constructing connections between trail systems. This has been unfeasible up to this point due to land ownership patterns combined with limitations of topography. Public access off of New York Avenue has also been a question due to limitations of existing surveys.

The Recreation District wishes to work in conjunction with the BLM to construct and manage a trailhead and a trail network to work towards meeting these community goals. User groups have also requested that a trail be constructed that connects the trails at Ecology Park with the Section 13 trail system to enhance the trail based opportunities in this area along with additional longer distance loop opportunities that are tied with Temple Canyon Road. With the potential for resolving trespassing issues and aiding the community in their enhancement goals along with strong partnership opportunities this request has become much more compelling.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The overall goal of the project is to work with the community of Canon City to help them meet their goals of enhanced economic development through outdoor recreation, improve the quality of life for the local residents by providing high quality opportunities close to homes, and engage youth in nature. In order to achieve these goals formal, legal trails that can be mapped and signed must be established and they must be of high quality to engage youth and attract visitors. The routes would provide key connections between people's homes and designated trail networks as well as Grape Creek and the Section 13 trail system increasing the availability of recreation opportunities, reducing automobile dependency, and improving the quality of life for the area's residents.

DECISION TO BE MADE

The BLM will decide whether to implement the proposed Ecology Park Area Trail Development project based on the analysis contained in the Environmental Assessment (EA). The EA will analyze the impacts of designating and constructing trails and associated facilities on BLM managed lands outside of Canon City, Colorado as outlined in the proposed action. The BLM may choose to: a) implement the project as proposed, b) implement the project with modifications/mitigation, c) implement an alternative to the proposed action, or d) not implement the project at this time.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: 05/13/1996

Decision Number/Page: 10-39, 10-64, 10-66

Decision Language:

10-39: The transportation system will be improved and maintained to facilitate public access and monitoring through; providing access to all retention lands.

10-64: Recreation will be managed to provide for: a variety of recreational opportunities and settings; additional opportunities for mountain biking, hiking, off-highway vehicle use, interpretation, and horseback riding; facility development will be accomplished to reduce user conflicts and to improve visitor health and safety.

10-66: Various actions will occur to enhance recreation: upland recreation opportunities emphasizing a balance between resource protection and tourism; coordination with various volunteer and user groups; monitoring and visitor contacts to ensure visitor safety, resource protection, and visitor information availability; provide for acquisitions or easements to enhance water based recreation, mountain biking, off-highway vehicle use, hiking horseback riding, hunting, and natural/cultural resource interpretation.

In January 1997, the Colorado State Office of the BLM approved the Standards for Public Land Health and amended all RMPs in the State. Standards describe the conditions needed to sustain public land health and apply to all uses of public lands.

Standard 1: Upland soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates that are appropriate to soil type, climate, land form, and geologic processes.

Standard 2: Riparian systems associated with both running and standing water function properly and have the ability to recover from major disturbance such as fire, severe grazing, or 100-year floods.

Standard 3: Healthy, productive plant and animal communities of native and other desirable species are maintained at viable population levels commensurate with the species and habitat's potential.

Standard 4: Special status, threatened and endangered species (federal and state), and other plants and animals officially designated by the BLM, and their habitats are maintained or enhanced by sustaining healthy, native plant and animal communities.

Standard 5: The water quality of all water bodies, including ground water where applicable, located on or influenced by BLM lands will achieve or exceed the Water Quality Standards established by the State of Colorado.

Because standards exist for each of these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in Chapter 3 of this document.

PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information on the Proposed Action and Alternatives. Alternatives considered but not analyzed in detail are also discussed.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED IN DETAIL

Proposed Action

The BLM in cooperation with local trail groups, Fremont County, and the Canon City Area Metropolitan Recreation and Park District (Recreation District) propose to establish a non-motorized trail network along with a trailhead on a combination of BLM, easements through private land, and Recreation District owned land located between New York Avenue and Temple Canyon Road in Canon City, Colorado. The trail network would be comprised of existing social trails, old roads, and the construction of new trails to best meet the stated purpose and need. While specific trails have been identified the proposed action is intended to be somewhat conceptual in nature to allow for flexibility in the management of recreation in this area and additional connections or spurs could also be allowed in this area if warranted. All of the trails proposed would be open to foot, horse and bicycle use.

Portions of the trail system would be jointly managed between the BLM and the Canon City Area Metropolitan Parks and Recreation District. This would be limited to the trailhead off of New York Avenue and trails within the Recreation District held trail easement. An agreement would be established to outline the roles and responsibilities of each entity. Fremont County manages Ecology Park and would continue to do so.

While still in the conceptual phase core trail system concepts and management objectives have been identified as follows.

The overall management goal for the trails in this area is to provide a close to town recreation escape for both residents and tourists based in Canon City. The location and natural setting should provide connections with nature and contemplation and also lend to improved health and fitness with longer recreation outings provided through connecting with other trail systems. The close proximity to town and provided connections make it a logical choice for skill progression providing different ranges of challenge. Signing and overall layout and management should be designed to accommodate visitors and reduce confusion and frustration for new users. Safety concerns related to open ditches would be addressed to reduce known hazards in the area.

Components of the proposal include the following;

- Schepp Trail - It is intended to keep the somewhat 'social trail' character as currently exists with a more difficult and rustic trail management objective. Management controls including but not limited to signing, re-routes and barriers would be put in place to direct use and discourage trespass on adjacent private lands. Private/easement boundaries would be well marked to prevent trespassing.
- West Trail - Portions of this trail would utilize an existing road while other portions would require new trail construction. In order to provide a more beginner friendly route this trail would be 3'-4' wide with gentle grades. Undulations and other playful features would be integrated into the design and construction to engage youth and provide a high quality recreation experience.
- Eagle Wing Trail – This trail would be designed to accommodate hiking use only and would be very primitive allowing users a greater connection with nature. Users of the trail would feel they are largely discovering the trail themselves where at times it feels like it is little more than a game trail/social trail. Steps and rock slabs along with steep grades would likely be necessary. This occurs almost primarily on BLM land but would still require permissions through private land owners and would be contingent upon this. A safety hazard created by large loose rocks on the northern end would need to be mitigated.
- An approximately .25 mile trail would be established that travels to the top of 'Sandy Hill' to provide hikers another viewpoint destination. This trail would be 18"-24" in width and be designed as a 'destination trail' with a fairly direct alignment to discourage short-cutting. A social trail is already being created that provides this same opportunity demonstrating a strong desire by the public wanting to take advantage of this viewpoint. This occurs on both BLM and through the Schepp Property easements.
- An approximately 2 mile trail would be established that connects Ecology Park to Section 13. The trail would be 18"-24" in width and provide a more difficult opportunity with

some rock obstacles that may be difficult for novice riders. Depending upon the final alignment there may be some level of exposure and bedrock making it most difficult. In order to avoid steep terrain and sections of bedrock the preferred route would require an easement through private property. The secondary route would stay entirely on BLM managed lands and travel further up the hillside to avoid private lands. This trail would not be constructed until an easement is in place through the private land or negotiations have been attempted and an easement is determined to not be feasible. This could be either from a cost standpoint or unsuccessful negotiations with the private land owner.

- Two trails would be established that connect with Temple Canyon Road higher up near city owned Temple Canyon Park. These trails would be designed to be more to most difficult providing longer more strenuous opportunities. They would be more remote with a lower level of maintenance and users could expect more obstacles. Bedrock and other natural terrain may be incorporated into the trail to provide challenge. Alternative lines around these obstacles would be provided if terrain allows. They would be designed to accommodate bikes and suitable for both climbing and descending. Due to the connection with Temple Canyon road at a higher elevation shuttling bike riders to the top of the trail with a vehicle could become a popular option. To facilitate this type of use a small parking area may need to be established. Any new parking areas along Temple Canyon road would be coordinated with Fremont County.
- The De-Weese ditch travels through this area and is mostly buried with openings. Several of these openings are only loosely covered and pose a safety hazard. Working in cooperation with the ditch company these openings would be secured prior to the trails being opened for public use.
- A dam associated with De-Weese Ditch is in close proximity to the proposed trail alignment. A portion has been breached leaving a large overhanging hole that poses a safety hazard for the public. This safety hazard would be addressed in the most appropriate manner in conjunction with the ditch company.
- Roads and trails located on BLM managed lands that are not designated through this plan and not required for administrative access would be closed and rehabilitated. Closure could include installation of barriers such as fencing and rocks as well as signing. Rehabilitation could include de-compacting the soil and seeding.
- Coordination would also occur with the County in regards to Ecology Park to ensure that access is provided only in desired locations to prevent trespass and continued use of undesired social trails and trespassing.

As components of the project are finalized BLM would conduct site specific resource surveys as needed. Depending upon final design additional NEPA may be required.

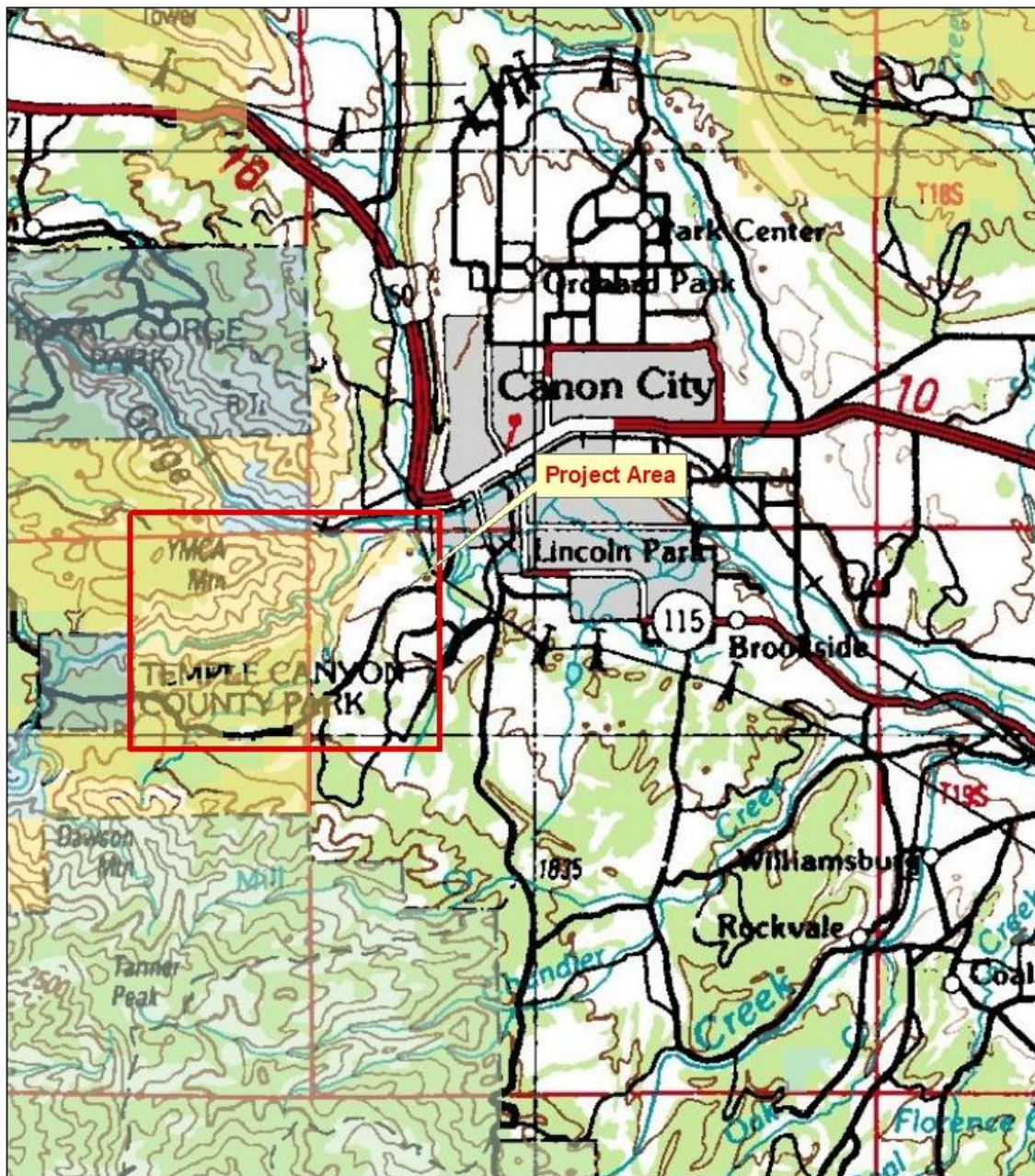
All trail construction would follow International Mountain Biking Association's (IMBA) trail guidelines and standards to provide a sustainable high quality trail recreation opportunity. These include but are not limited to:

1. A trail's grade should not exceed half the grade of the hillside or side slope where it is located unless located on a suitable surface (i.e. bedrock);
2. An average trail grade of 10 percent or less is most sustainable;
3. Maximum trail grade should not exceed 10-20 percent and should be based on considerations such as soil type, number and type of users, and annual rainfall;
4. Frequent grade reversals (such as rolling dips, drainage dips, etc.) should be used to promote drainage of water; and
5. Trail tread should be out sloped (5 percent recommended) to encourage water to sheet across and off the trail.

Trails and improvements would be built using a combination of hand crews, volunteers, and heavy equipment. Any equipment used for construction would be washed prior to being brought onto site to minimize the spread of noxious weed species. If gasoline powered equipment is used for construction, an adequate spill kit and shovels would be onsite during project implementation. Seeds used for restoration would be certified weed-free. The location of the trail would be located and designed to avoid highly erosive soils and sensitive plant species. Construction of the trails could begin as early as spring 2015 and continue until completed pending funding and personnel.

If paleontological resources are discovered during construction all construction activities would cease and BLM specialists would be brought in to advise and supervise. The trail will be monitored by a paleontologist, qualified to hold a Paleontological Resource Use Permit on a cyclic basis of every 5 years to minimize any impact to protected fossil resources. The purpose of monitoring would be to identify and remove any exposed fossil resources from the trail corridor to reduce the chances of fossil theft. A qualified paleontologist shall also be present during any trail construction or trail maintenance that would encounter bedrock.

During construction vegetation disturbance would be avoided from May 15 through July 15. This is the breeding and brood rearing season for most Colorado migratory birds.



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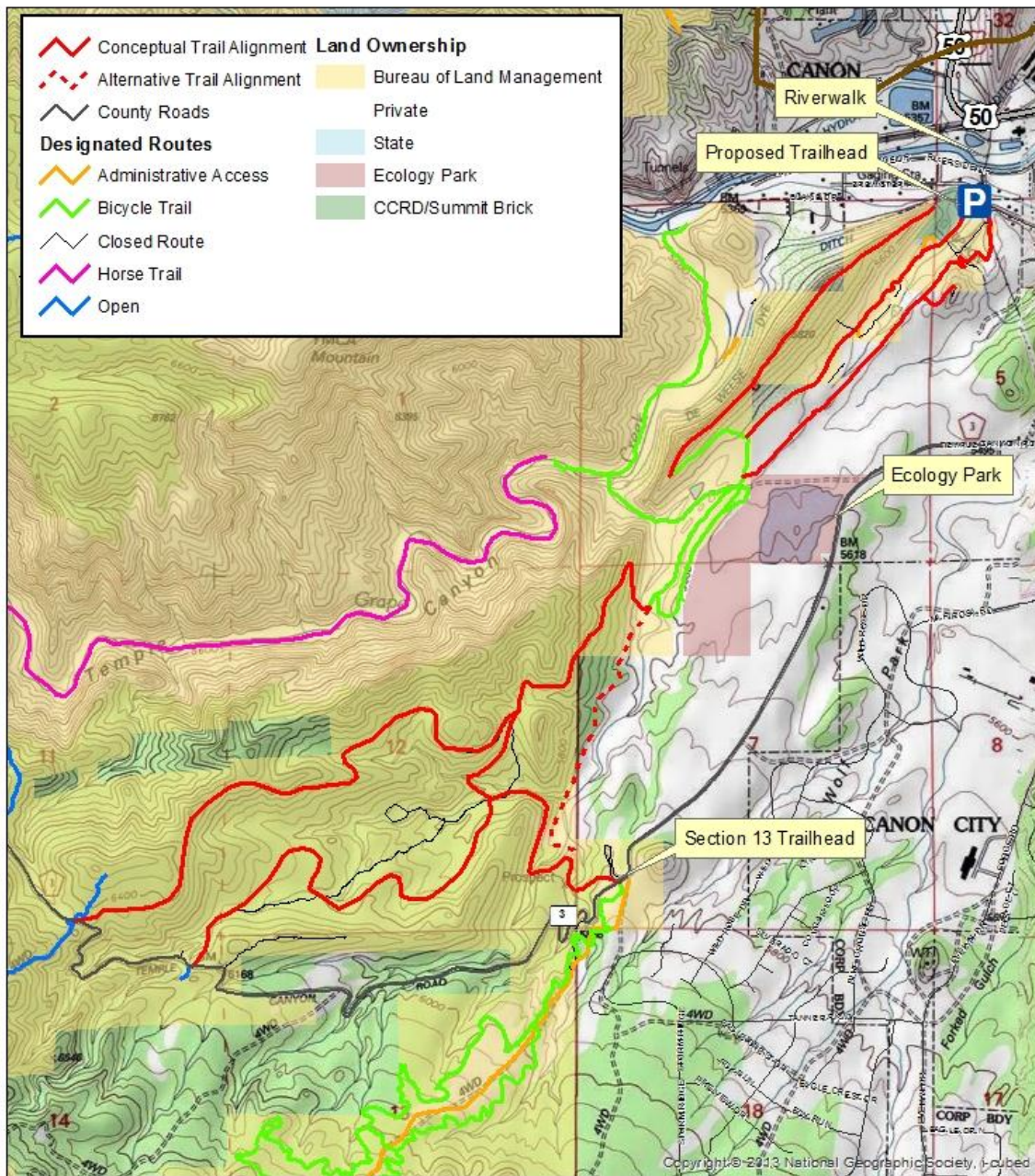


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6th PM, T19S, R70W Sections 5, 6, 7
T 19S, R71W Section 11, 12, 14

0 0.375 0.75 1.5 2.25 3 Miles

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0 0.1 0.2 0.4 0.6 0.8 Miles



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